

A REEXAMINATION OF THE ORIGIN AND CAUSES OF BOKO HARAM INCURSION IN  
NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The menace of Boko Haram Incursion is undoubtedly devastating not only to the persons affected but to the country's socio-political and economic milieu. And the attempt put in place to ameliorate the situation produces lingering results. Consequently, this paper reexamines the causes of Boko Haram Insurgency professed by academicians, International Organizations and policy makers in which poverty, catastrophic governance and extremism were indicted. However, the paper subverts these postulations as minor or just as exacerbating factors. The major factor of Boko Haram Insurgency according to this paper is "Affluence" rather than poverty or bad governance. The paper believes that for meaningful comprehension of the whole saga, the issue need to be studied within the context of its origination. Anything short of that would be an exercise in futility.*

Key Concepts: Boko Haram, Insurgency, Incursion, Affluence

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the causes and origin of Boko Haram Incursion in Nigeria. It is not the intention here to provide any new data on Boko Haram but rather on the basis of existing records, to try and pieces together, the different perceptions and offer an explanation that would appear acceptable by centralizing the various activities and actors around a common factor. The major problem of a paper like this is that there are myriad perspectives on the issue under study and each with a distinct ideological extrapolations and convictions that what it projects is the right therapy.

However, this paper reexamines all the causes professed by various analysts and argues that they were by far not the real causes of Boko Haram uprisings. They are rather, contributory factors which are being exploited by some villains whose vanity, arrogance, lack of foresight, selfishness, greed or outright self-delusion plunged their society into annihilating conflict. However, the “Affluence” that provides the resources and the wherewithal to sustain and maintain the sect of Boko Haram is surely responsible for all the evils that befell our society. In other words “Affluence” rather than poverty is the much cause of the Insurgency.

The historical origin of Boko Haram’s destructive ideologies has been unraveled, because doing such, will transparently illuminate our understanding of the real motive of the sect, which is destruction and promotion of the agenda of their sponsors rather than enthronement of Sharia law and Islamisation. Since the purpose of studying conflicts is presumably to facilitate its control this paper therefore, offered some suggestions which if implemented the menace of Boko Haram would be a thing of the past.

### **Clarification of Concepts:**

**Boko Haram:** This is an un-Islamic sect founded by Muhammad Yusuf in 2002 at Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state (Momoh, 2013, p. 129). One of its cardinal objectives as it claimed is to establish Islamic Sharia, first in the North East and then in the whole country. To achieve this obnoxious objective the sect embarked on destructive mission of killing spree, Muslims praying in the mosques, Christian worshipping in churches, Children in Schools etc. were mercilessly butchered. A most tragic aspect of Boko Haram Incursion is their repugnance to fundamental Islamic rules of engagement which seeks to protect the un-armed civilians, women, old and

children. Virtually the whole of North East had gone up in flames, houses and properties ruined and of course with thousands of death, there is mass hysteria and exodus of the civilian population as a result of the indiscriminate use of firearms.

**Affluence:** Affluence from the perspective of this piece refers to abundant or copious wealth appropriated from whatever type of transactions and spent in whatever way legal or extralegal.

**Insurgency/ Incursion:** Insurgency refers to an organized rebellion aimed at overthrowing a constituted authority through the use of armed conflict. And Incursion, on the other hand, refers to occupation of specified enemy's territory by military or subversive elements.

### **The Historical Antecedents of Boko Haram and its Extremists Ideologies**

*Jama'atu Ahlil-Sunnah Lil-Da'awatu wal Jihad* popularly known as *Boko Haram* is an un-Islamic movement founded by Muhammad Yusuf in 2002, whether the adherents of the sect are Muslims or not is not an important issue here, what is important is the origin of its ideology that by far surpassed Muhammad Yusuf, Al-Qaida or ISIS; the international terrorist organizations which some analysts believe Boko Haram derives its ideologies from. But the most important thing to note here is that, *Boko Haram* is not different from any other sect if not because of its extremist's ideologies that make them unique. The origin of this radical and the debilitating ideologies can be traced to Kharijism or Khawarij.

The Khawarijite are members of a school of thought which emerged in the first century of Islam under the leadership of Wahb-al-Rasibi who was elected after the group seceded from the army of Ali bin Abu Talib (R.A) the fourth Caliph. The group declared the fourth Caliph as disbeliever because he agreed to make peace with the forces of Mu'awiyya bin Abu Sufyan at the battle of Siffin in 657 and in 661 the Kharijites attacked and killed Ali (R.A). The group continued to cause havoc to the Islamic world.

Their sacrilegious innovations and extreme doctrines differentiate them from the mainstream Muslims community. They are noted for adopting a radical approach that justifies the spillage of blood and forceful confiscation of wealth of the group's perceived enemy. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was reported to have said with regards to the Khawarijite that they are the worst of people and the worst of creation. Ali (R.A) said I heard prophet (PBUH) saying:

*“In the last days of the world there will appear young people with foolish thoughts and ideas”*  
([www.darussalamblog.com](http://www.darussalamblog.com)).

And the prophet said that they will continue to create strife till the end of time (Sahih-Muslims No. 1067). The veracity of this prophecy translates in the formation of Boko Haram a sect which gives no room for compromise. Like the Khawarij, Boko Haram regarded individual right to life as fetish of the past as such it justifies the killing of innocent people, through an insane orgy of destructions whose ferocity and viciousness have no match in the history of Nigeria. The majority of the adherents were bunch of illiterates who do not have the rudimentary knowledge of Islam. They were zealot enticed by the enthusiasm of destruction against whatever they regard as “godless” and the “apostates”.

It is with this penchant zeal the crisis started and permeates every aspect of society. Youth who are at their prime age of life took up arms against the society and this resulted in the destruction of lives and properties worth billions of naira. More than 3.3 million people were forcefully ejected from their abode of domicile and become refugees in the land of their birth. This is the highest number in Africa. (Tijjani, 2012)

### **A Diagnosis of the Causes of Boko Haram**

An important issue informing the conduct of Boko Haram is the extent to which the sect was able to brainwash Nigerians into believing that the major cause of their Incursion is to establish Sharia Law and Islamize Nigeria. This fallacy transparently obscures the vision of many people and sweeps everything under the carpet in manner that makes it impossible for many analysts and commentators to identify interests, actors and agencies actually involved and responsible for the crisis of Boko Haram. It is here argued that, this stance has no foundation in factual evidence and fails to provide the sort of realistic cause required to understand the genuine motive behind Boko Haram Incursion. The real motive here is to use the issue of enthronement of Islamic Sharia or Islamisation to polarize the country along religious and ethnic divide as well as to paralyze the will of the people to stand together against a common enemy. Regrettably, many analysts subscribe to this simplistic viewpoint (Copeland, 2013; Mathew, 2012; Momoh, 2013).

The sect is unequivocally convinced of the fact that when people are divided along these fault lines there would be animosity, suspicion and hatred among them. Consequently, the sect hides under the banner of Islam and ruthlessly attacks Christians and their places of worships. This succeeded in entrenching suspicion and hatred towards the Muslims community by some Christians in the North-East in particular and Nigeria in general. It is therefore arduous if not an impossibility for a people divided along socio-cultural or religious lines to galvanize effort against a common enemy. This have always informed the strategies of engagement of Boko Haram and their sponsors.

We cannot blame religion for the errors of those who use its name to justify their heinous crime, all religions have had their share of people who claimed to be strict adherents to their traditions, but who in reality grossly misinterpreted their sacred text to suit their own agenda. Religion commands love, mercy, peace and compassion. Terror on the other side is antithetical to religious values; it's cruel, savage, merciless, demands bloodshed and hatches misery.

Another important issue worth considering is the fact that the leaders and sponsors of Boko Haram know quite well that given the nature of the changed international climate it is not possible for a terrorist group to operate freely or depose a democratically elected government, talk less of establishing an Islamic State without the consent of comity of nations. Therefore, to consider the need to Islamize Nigeria as a cause of Boko Haram Incursion is pure mystification of facts and a muddled thinking expressed in pretentious form.

Also, some analysts were of the view that the killing of Muhammad Yusuf the founder of Boko Haram by the police is the most important single factor of Boko Haram terrorism. This factor is not true, because considering the nature of ideological basis of the sect, even if Muhammad Yusuf was alive it will carry on with its destructive agenda, what they were only waiting for was the time to strike to materialize.

The prevalence of poverty in Nigeria and its catastrophic impact on the people is another factor which is being idolized by many analysts as the major cause of Boko Haram. Of course, there is poverty in Nigeria and the situation is such a pitiful one considering the fact that poverty has become a national symbol. Therefore, to say that Nigerians are wallowing in abject poverty is to

state the obvious. A country which at one time pronounced to the whole world that the greatest problem facing it was how to spend money is now rated among the most poor in the world.

A cursory look at the available statistics paints a gloomy picture of the nature and dynamics of poverty in the country. The National Human Development Report 2002 shows that no less than 70 percent of the Nigerian population lives below poverty line. And again In 2003, 70 percent of Nigerian households were rated poor while 34 percent was below poverty line; under five years mortality rate was 187 out of every 1000 birth; illiteracy stood at 40 percent while life expectancy was 52 percent. In addition, Professor Mbaya Kakwenda in Fani Kayode (2005, p. 5) opined that poverty situation deteriorated by 25 percent despite the inception of democratic rule in 1999 compared with the figure of 28.1 percent two decades ago. Between 2004 and 2006 poverty headcount stood around 54.4 percent. From 2007, population of Nigerians living below 1.25 USD was 64.4 percent. In the same period, 83.9 percent was living below 2 USD and 34.1 percent below the national poverty line (NHDR; 2007-2008). Life expectancy in Nigeria is 51.7 years and the Human Development Index places the country as number 148 on hierarchy of 173 countries in 2002.

From the above it is transparently discernible that poverty is interwoven in the fabric of our national life. There is lack in basic human needs such as minimum nutritional requirements for sustainable livelihoods, basic education, and access to primary health care, clean water, electricity, decent housing and healthy environment.

Similarly, this lack reinforces poverty and exposes people to greater social deprivation and insecurity. Consequently, the country is troubled with high incidents of armed robbery, kidnappings, assassinations, bombings, bloodletting and vandalization of gas and petroleum pipelines. There is no doubt that the poverty question has a direct link with societal upheavals. But contrary to the popular belief, the contention here is that poverty on its own cannot lead to violent conflict of Boko Haram magnitude. But rather the condition of poverty is being exploited by the forces of “Affluence” to cause pandemonium and destructions.

Another factor with a poverty outlook and which was believed by Amina Muhammad the UN deputy secretary; to have fuelled the Boko Haram Insurgency is the shrinking of the Lake Chad, which has shrinks to about 90 percent. Lake Chad according to her provides a source of

livelihood to nearly 30 million people in the North-East region (<http://www.premiumtimes.com>). It is in fact very funny to accept this as a cause of insurgency, because it sounds as if people pick and drop their weapons in cyclical and recurring passion, whenever the lake desiccates the people will carry their arms and vent their anger on the society. And when the problem stops and the level of water increases, then people will sheath their swords and return back to their normal businesses and carry them again when the problem resurfaces. A diehard terrorist would never do that.

Bad governance and poverty are the two sides of a coin; they are intricately interwoven to the extent that one cannot be without the other. Bad governance did not only breed poverty but is the architect and the foundation of all the evils that befell the country. In spite of the country's robust endowment in minerals and human resources the condition of the country is nothing to write home about. According to Shamsuddini (2010, p.5) cited in Tijjani (2012, p. 149) Nigeria's government has made a lot of mistakes in the way the resources of the country were utilized. Professor Chinua Achebe also argues that, the problem with Nigeria is that of leadership (1983, p. 11-12).

This implies that the problem associated with nature and character of the ruling elite since 1960 is fundamental to the understanding of the problems confronting us. Leaders behave as if they have other country than Nigeria. They have continued to demonstrate a shameful lack of interest in the prospect of the country. Nothing has change with the emergence of democratic governance in 1999 but the intensification of corruption which has become pervasive, with the ruling elite as its vanguard.

As a result there is a serious decline in the living standard, the great hardship experienced by the majority of the people had led to a great deal of social turbulence. The rubles of economic ruins and stench of social dislocation that catastrophic governance wrought assailed every nostril and triggered inevitable anger.

Obviously, the government has abandoned its responsibilities as well as the course of justice. Under these circumstances, the helpless youth resorted to all form of crimes. It is clear that before there could be a fertile ground for any form of insurgency to germinate there must be perceived or real injustice which denied the aggrieved a way of expressing themselves, other



than the means recognized by international community as stated in No. 2 of article 20 of the African Charter on Human and People's Right to which Nigeria is a signatory:

“Colonized or oppressed people shall have the right to free themselves from the bond or dominion by resorting to any means recognized by the international community” (Adams, 2003, 96).

From the above discussion on the causes of Boko Haram Insurgency, it is apparent that we are confronted with myriad factors which many scholars, social commentators, international organizations and well meaning Nigerians believe to be responsible for the problem under study. Obviously, this modest piece is not disputing the fact that poverty, bad governance, shrinking of the Lake Chad or the killing of Muhammad Yusuf among others, have contributed to the Boko Haram crisis in one way or the other, but the contention here is that all these factors examined are by far not the major causes of Boko Haram Incursion, rather they are contributory factors which, even if address individually or collectively the problem would persist, as it is being witnessed now. And if we did not look at the situation along this perspective, our perceptions would not in any way be shaped to understand the real actors and factors responsible for Boko Haram Incursion.

### **Affluence and the Boko Haram Incursion**

War given its destructive and retrogressive effect is not a phenomenon that a civilized people would ever wish for themselves, no right thinking individual would want his people to be killed, their wealth decimated and society destroyed, unless such a person, is among the nefarious few who gain from and therefore have a stake in contributing to the breaches of public order and security in our communities. This is to say that, the state of nature we found ourselves in Nigeria is not imposed by nature but by man's cruelty to his fellow man. However the natural impulse of man to be free, an impulse unacceptable to the beneficiaries of the unjust statusquo, beneficiaries who make peaceful change impossible and in the alternative make violent change inevitable.

Majority of these people were referred to as the Affluent, they possess the wealth of the society and have reached the stage of self actualization. They were always found at the highest echelon of the societal ladder by virtue of their obscene wealth. These people are too ambitious, greedy and envious of the positions occupied by their former mates. And many of them are found in the

con industry; armed robbery, kidnapping, drug trafficking and many extrajudicial transactions. This explication, gives us a clear picture of those who finance the crisis that threatens the existence of the country. The question that needs objective analysis here, is how did “Affluence” became a major cause of Boko Haram crisis.

The answer to this question is simple and straight forward. The Affluence became a major cause of Boko Haram Insurgency, because it breathes life to it and provides the resources possible for its maintenance and sustenance. It provides the money for the procurement of arms and ammunitions; it provides money for the purchase of foodstuff to sustain thousands of combatants and captives, it provides the resources for the purchase of vehicles and the petroleum to run them and it also provides drugs for the wounded army etc. Even though, we don’t have figures to substantiate our assertion, the large amount of money the federal government spent in fighting Boko Haram which is over N 257.5 billion (<http://www.proshareng.com>), is enough to tell us that Boko Haram sponsors are spending a lot of money to maintain the sect.

Again, if we have a glimpse of the whole incidence of Boko Haram in relation to the number of local governments they had occupied, the vastness of the area of operation which is more than 47 percent of Nigeria’s land mass (<http://www.peoshare.com>), the nature and sophistication of the arsenals and the superiority of the fire power with which they attack and overruns fortified police and the military formations and the ease with which they traverse the whole of North East and other parts of the country, one will be convince of the fact that somebody behind the scene (Affluence) is responsible for providing the needs of the sect.

At the inception of the crisis in 2009, Boko Haram used weapons that can best be describe as local and very crude, ranging from Dane guns to clubs cudgels, knives, cutlasses and vow and arrows. There were, however, quite a few modern weapons such as pistols and rifles which were manned by conscripts who do not have the requisite experience, training and skills for an effective utilization of the tools.

It is not only that, these recruits were inexperience but majority of them are illiterates, unemployed and poor. They are weak dejected and incapacitated, they hardly feed themselves, they do not have money to purchase arms and liberate themselves from the shackles of bad governance. The high cost of weapons in the black market as the table below shows will

certainly prove us right that the poor cannot purchase large amount of arms to cause a conflict of Boko Haram magnitude.

Types Of weapons		Prices
1.	AK47	N 100, 000
2.	Rocket Propeller Grenade (RPG)	N 250, 000
3.	Berretta and other foreign weapons	N 50, 000
4.	Locally made Pistols	N 25, 000

\*This Table is drawn by the authors from the information appropriated from a book written by Sam Momah (2013) Nigeria beyond Divorce: Amalgamation in perspective.

From the above table it can easily be inferred that, it is not possible for a people whose major preoccupation is how to survive, to purchase weapons and cause mayhem of Boko Haram scale.

Going by the above, it is imperative to state here that the Boko Haram crisis can partly be attributed to the huge amount of money expended by the sponsors of the sect and partly due to unending dialogue between the sponsors of Boko Haram and masses. Through such contacts, the masses that were already aggrieved would fall prey to the deception of the elite by accepting the destructive ideologies put before them as an alternative panacea to their problems. Consequently, the elite may find those who are willing to listen to him not necessarily for rational acceptance of his ideologies but because of what they could get from him or as a reaction to the hatred of the prevailing conditions.

When the masses fall prey to treachery of the affluent they will then be provided with arms, food not necessarily enough, money, and sometimes, hard drugs and charms to unleash terror and violent conflict leading to destruction of lives and properties, as well as the total breakdown of law and order. This is how affluence becomes a source of the conflict because conflict is not a matter of armaments but the money that makes the armaments effective.

With these we surely cannot continue to excuse the affluent or those who championed the course of terror from every doom that befalls our people and society. More so, if any criticism is to be made and blame be apportioned it is not against the mass complacency. We should direct our frustrations at those ambitious rich who daily profess their solidarity with the masses but are also disdainful of the masses.

## **Recommendations**

It must be admitted, if anything that, there is an avalanche of recommendations about the alternative paths to Boko Haram problems but one thing that is crucial is that there must be a political will by the government to match words with action. And the government should understand that one of its prime responsibilities is protect the lives and properties of its citizens by whatever means.

Similarly, for a lasting solution to the crisis of Boko Haram, the government should do everything within its powers to find out and ruthlessly execute the financiers of the sect both within and outside the country. In doing so, the government should also collaborate with and seek the assistance of other countries and international organizations not only in fighting Boko Haram but in trying to fish out the figures financing the activities of the sect.

When the people behind the scene (sponsors) were identified the government should then freeze their accounts and confiscate their assets in such a way that they could not cause any problem to societal peace.

Also the current program of radicalization of the incarcerated members of Boko Haram should be stopped. This is because no amount of radicalization could purify their already polluted mind. And since they are claiming Islam, they should therefore be taken to Sharia courts, and their trials be done exclusively under the tenet of Islamic laws, where offenders face the full wrath of the law, murderers face death sentences, and the principle of an “eye with an eye” is strictly applied.

The government should as a matter of expediency create and implement policies that will alleviate the suffering of the masses. Thus, for the poor and the vulnerable groups, democracy is meaningless if they will continue in perpetual wants. It means nothing to them if they cannot eat properly, find jobs, send their children to schools or have minimum decent health care services. Human resources are the most important asset a nation should have. If the citizens of a country are sick or poor the country itself will follow suit.

Youth are the leaders of tomorrow, if they are not well catered for and well protected from partaking in criminal activities, there is going to be a great vacuum for harnessing their youthful exuberance, capability and talents towards the development of the nation. Youth should

therefore, be given special place in all national plans and programs so that they can be good ambassadors for peaceful coexistence.

## **Conclusion**

It is the humble submission of this paper that the major cause of Boko Haram Incursion in Nigeria is “Affluence” it is from the wallet of the rich that the whole imbroglio is financed. Obviously, the crisis could have been started as a violent protest against what the members of the sect perceived as grave injustice done to them, or that, the majority of the sect’s members could have been recruited from the poverty class, or even, from those that were discontent with how the country is being governed and wanted to settle a score, or even again, from bunch of sympathizers, but the argument here is that the conflict would never have escalated to the stage we are witnessing now without the role of “Affluence”. And the government has done little or nothing at all to identify and prosecute those responsible for sponsoring the sect.

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